

SALTON SEA ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING

August 2, 2006

9:30 – 3:30

San Diego, CA

Welcome and Introductions

Mike Chrisman, Secretary for Resources, welcomed the Committee Members and led introductions of those present (see attached list).

Updates from the Resources Agency

Secretary Chrisman provided an overview of the meeting agenda and introduced Senator Denise Moreno Ducheny. Senator Ducheny noted that she was pleased to be here in San Diego and thanked the Advisory Committee and the public for being here today and continuing to participate in the State's process. The Senator noted that it is important for the Advisory Committee to work out the technical components/actions. The State's process should not focus on costs until after there is an understanding of the restoration options that are feasible and that protect the important values at the Sea. In addition, construction actions will occur over 20 years, and all of the funding does not need to be secured at the time restoration actions are initiated. However, securing funding will require federal, state, local, and non-governmental organization support and participation.

Senator Ducheny noted that the No Action Alternative is not a realistic option. The Salton Sea is a valuable resource for the environment and for the people of the Imperial and Coachella valleys. The challenge will be to better inform the rest of the State on the importance of protecting the biological and human values of the Salton Sea.

Public Comments

The following public comment was provided:

- The State and the Salton Sea Authority should work together to develop the Salton Sea as an ecotourism destination. This would result in a more sustainable income for the local community and would maintain the environmental health of the Salton Sea.

Overview of QSA Habitat

Bruce Wilcox, Imperial Irrigation District (IID), provided an update on the implementation status of the habitat-related mitigation measures for the IID Water Conservation and Transfer Project. The various measures continue to be implemented; however, some of the field work has been temporarily scaled back due to the hot weather. A public

information workshop was held on July 27 as part of the Natural Community Conservation Plan process. In addition, the Notice of Preparation for the related environmental document was recently released and the Notice of Intent should be released shortly.

Update on U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Activities

Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), provided an update on Reclamation's Feasibility Study. Reclamation is continuing to evaluate the various engineering and environmental aspects of their short-list of alternatives. This includes the alternatives proposed by both the Imperial Group and the Salton Sea Authority. Mr. Walker noted that the alternatives under evaluation reflect most of the alternatives included in the State's process. Reclamation and the State are working closely and have met several times to coordinate on the alternatives considered and the various analyses. In addition, Reclamation is working closely with the Salton Sea Authority. The draft Feasibility Study is scheduled to be completed in October. Copies of the report will be made available to the Committee Members.

Update on Salton Sea Authority's Activities

Rick Daniels, Salton Sea Authority (SSA), provided an update on the SSA's activities. On June 29, the SSA Board of Directors formally adopted the SSA's Salton Sea Revitalization and Restoration Plan. Imperial County, Riverside County, and the Coachella Valley Water District have also formally approved and/or ratified the plan. The Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians Tribal Council and the Imperial Irrigation District Board of Directors are considering formal approval and/or ratification of the plan at future meetings. In addition, Imperial County, Riverside County, the Coachella Valley Water District, and the Imperial Irrigation District have committed \$150,000 per year for the next two years to fund the SSA. Various cities within the watershed have also committed to funding some of the SSA's public outreach activities.

Mr. Daniels noted that the SSA recently conducted a public outreach poll. There were a total of 600 respondents, with 300 respondents each from the Imperial and Coachella valleys. The survey focused on registered voters and was conducted by phone in both Spanish and English. Based on the preliminary survey results, 56 percent of the people polled in the Coachella Valley and 57 percent of those polled in the Imperial Valley said that the local community should be involved in the restoration of the Salton Sea. Of those polled in the Coachella Valley, the number 1 issue was wildlife, followed by odor, air quality in general, and recreation. Of those polled in the Imperial Valley, the number 1 issue related to the Salton Sea was wildlife, followed by dust, air quality in general, and recreation. The preliminary survey results are being verified and the final survey results will be posted on the SSA's website when they become available. In addition to the phone survey, seven focused groups are being established to obtain more in-depth information.

Based on a question from a Committee Member, it was noted that although the survey only polled residents of the Coachella and Imperial valleys, it may be expanded in the future to include areas outside of the Salton Sea watershed. In addition, future surveys will likely be conducted to track progress and public opinions as the SSA, the State, and Reclamation move forward with their efforts.

Based on a question from Secretary Chrisman, Mr. Daniels noted that the SSA has provided information on their Combined North and South Lakes Alternative to the Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Department of Fish and Game (DFG). However, Mr. Daniels noted that the SSA's plan has been revised since the information was submitted and will continue to be revised. The overall concept remains the same, but some of the details of the plan are changing. For example, subsequent to submitting information, the Combined North and South Lakes Plan was revised to give wildlife habitat a higher priority to inflow waters. Mr. Daniels noted that the SSA's comments on the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) will identify and describe these changes.

Process for Developing a Preferred Alternative

Jerry Johns, Deputy Director of DWR, provided an overview of the development of the preferred alternative. Mr. Johns noted that the Draft PEIR will be slightly different from most EIRs in that a preferred alternative will not be identified in the document. However, per the project's legislation, the Secretary must recommend a preferred alternative to the State Legislature, and would like to involve the Advisory Committee and the public in the selection of the preferred alternative.

Mr. Johns noted that selecting a preferred alternative will be challenging. However, we are not limited to selecting one alternative from the eight action alternatives that will be evaluated in the Draft PEIR; different components of the different alternatives can be mixed and matched or combined to formulate the preferred alternative. Phased implementation should also be considered in selection of a preferred alternative.

The basis of the alternatives is provided in the Fish and Game Code. These include providing the maximum feasible attainment of the following: 1) restoration of long term stable aquatic and shoreline habitat for historical levels and diversity of fish and wildlife that depend on the Salton Sea; 2) elimination of air quality impacts from restoration actions; and 3) protection of water quality. In addition, other considerations identified during scoping and public outreach that should be considered in selecting a preferred alternative include the following: 1) proximity of water to the existing shoreline; 2) recreational opportunities; and 3) length of time needed to develop a sustainable habitat and recreational opportunities. The eight alternatives each address most, if not all of these objectives and other considerations.

Gwen Buchholz, CH₂M HILL, provided an overview of how different components meet different objectives using the aquatic habitat components of the alternatives as an example. The alternatives focus on three different types of habitat, Saline Habitat

Complex, deep Marine Sea, and Shallow Marine Water, and these three different components could meet the objectives at various levels. For example, the Saline Habitat Complex would provide the following: 1) a stable aquatic and shoreline habitat; 2) a wide range of wildlife species with tilapia as the primary fish species; and 3) protection of water quality. Alternatives with a deep Marine Sea would also provide a stable aquatic and shoreline habitat and a wide range of wildlife species, but could provide a greater diversity of recreational fish species, however water quality could take longer (decades) to stabilize. Evaluation of the different components of the alternatives allows for differentiation amongst the alternatives and would allow for mixing and matching to develop a preferred alternative. However, with regard to air quality, the method to achieving air quality goals can be modified in the future, and therefore, it is not a differentiator of alternatives.

Mr. Johns noted that the focus should be on the goals that we would like to achieve and not on the infrastructure or components that we would like to build. There may be various ways to achieve the goals with various infrastructure components. It was noted that none of the alternatives achieve all of the goals for the various stakeholders, so trade offs will need to be considered.

Mr. Johns noted that the State would like to form a Working Group to frame the process for development of the preferred alternative and to recommend a preferred alternative to the Advisory Committee and the Secretary. The Working Group meetings would be open to all Committee members and the general public, but would focus specifically on the process for selecting a preferred alternative. The Working Group is expected to hold two or three meetings in the September/October timeframe. Committee Members that would like to participate in the Working Group should contact Dale Hoffman-Floerke.

Update on Pilot Shallow Water Habitat Project

Doug Barnum, U.S. Geological Survey, provided an update on the construction and development of the Pilot Shallow Water Habitat Project. As described at the June 2, 2006 Advisory Committee Meeting, the project consists of four shallow "cells" adjacent to the Salton Sea near the Alamo River. The objectives of the project include the following: 1) evaluating construction techniques for levee and islands; 2) evaluating durability of levees constructed with local sediments; 3) evaluating water, sediments and aquatic invertebrate response; and 4) evaluating bird use of the site.

Construction activities were initiated in early 2006. Cells 1 and 2 are currently flooded, and water is being delivered to cells 3 and 4. Water entering the project site is delivered to cell 1 and flows through cells in a sequential order (cells 1 to 2, cell 2 to 3, and so on), and thus, increasing salinities are seen in the different cells. Based on a question from a Committee Member, it was noted that the information and lessons learned from the pilot study can be used to modify the Saline Habitat Complex and related components of the Ecosystem Restoration Program.

Dr. Barnum noted that the site has seen very rapid invertebrate and bird colonization. Some fish-eating birds have also been seen on the site. Radio telemetry studies to document chick movement and mortality are underway. Based on the initial results, chicks are using the site in conjunction with adjacent areas. Due to the type of sensor used, chick mortality has been difficult to determine. Survivability and toxicity studies are also underway. These efforts are focused on the black-necked stilts due to the extensive amount of information available for this species and because this species has been observed breeding at the site. An ecorisk assessment is not expected to be completed until mid-year next year.

The Committee Members and the public are requested to stay away from the site to maintain the biological integrity. Contact Dr. Barnum for guided site visits.

On-going Fish Kill

Dr. Barnum noted that there is fish kill in progress at the Salton Sea. Jack Crayon, DFG, noted that DFG just finished sampling. There was about a 33 percent increase in tilapia over the last summer. Ranger Steve Bier of the California State Parks noted that they started seeing dead fish on Saturday morning in conjunction with a green tide, and the entire Varner Harbor is covered in dead fish. The extent of the fish kill is not known at this time; however, it does appear to be the largest kill in some time. Most of the dead fish are tilapia and most are young (sub-adult).

Approach to Funding Plan

Allan Highstreet, CH₂M HILL, provided an overview of the approach to the Funding Plan. The Fish and Game Code specifies that the Funding Plan should determine the monies that are, or may be, available to construct and operate the preferred project. Funding sources can include, but are not limited to the following: 1) the Salton Sea Restoration Fund; 2) State water and environmental bond monies; 3) Federal authorizations and appropriations; 4) monies through the Salton Sea infrastructure Financing District and local assessments by the Salton Sea Authority or its member agencies; and 5) user and other fees. The Funding Plan will include a cash flow analysis to determine when cash will be needed based on the likelihood of when facilities would be constructed. It will also identify potential funding sources, but it will not obligate funds from the different sources. In addition, the funding plan will include an Implementation Schedule that will identify information needs and decision points, or critical path design, permitting and construction decisions.

The funding sources and actions funded would be different in both phases of the project, and the Funding Plan will differentiate potential funding sources by project phase. The Funding Plan will consider the potential for multiple lead agencies, allow for different components to be funded by different sources, and may allocate benefits. Private-public partnerships will be considered in the Funding Plan.

To help shape the assumptions and analyses approach in the Funding Plan, a Working Group will be established. A minimum of one or two Working Group meetings are proposed. Committee Members are asked to contact Dale Hoffman-Floerke if they would like to participate in the Funding Plan Working Group. Based on a question from the public, it was noted that the Working Groups will explore potential private-public partnerships in more detail; these partnerships could include geothermal companies.

Based on a question from a Committee Member, it was noted that a land ownership map will be included in the Draft PEIR.

Review Process for Draft PEIR

Dale Hoffman-Floerke, DWR, provided an overview of the review process for the Draft PEIR. An Executive Summary of the Draft PEIR will be distributed in hardcopy and will contain a CD of the entire document in the back. The Draft PEIR will be available in hardcopy at various locations throughout the Salton Sea watershed and will also be available electronically on the project's website. The State anticipates a 60-day review period. Workshops will be held throughout the watershed and at various locations throughout the State, but no formal public hearings will be held. Written comments will be accepted at the public workshops and via mail. Ms. Hoffman-Floerke noted that DWR and DFG are working vigorously to meet the December 31, 2006 deadline; if the review period is extended past 60 days, then meeting this deadline will not be possible. The preferred alternative will not be selected until after the end of the Draft PEIR review period and the public workshops are held.

Members of the Advisory Committee discussed the need for public workshops prior to the release of the Draft PEIR, and a few members recommended that the workshops not be held until the Draft PEIR is available to the public. In addition, some Committee Members encouraged the State to hold public workshops in various locations throughout the State, and to provide enough notice time to allow Committee Members to alert their Boards of Directors and members of their organizations. A Committee Member also noted that the State and the Advisory Committee have worked hard on technical issues related to the restoration of the Salton Sea, and suggested that the Committee not rush to build consensus and select a preferred alternative just to meet the December deadline.

Sub-Sea Floor Investigation related to Seismic Activity and Sediment Location

Neal Driscoll, Graham Kent, Jeffrey Babcock, and Gordon Sietz, Scripps Institute of Oceanography, provided an overview of recent sub-Salton Sea floor investigations related to seismic activity and sediment location. The Committee Members discussed the applicability of the information and it was concluded that overall, a more extensive study of the fault location and the potential for seismic activity on faults located beneath the Salton Sea would be valuable information in designing and constructing a restoration project. However, this information is not necessary for the current PEIR process.

Summary of Action Items

The next Advisory Committee meeting will be held on October 25 in the Sacramento area. The location will be provided shortly. **(The next Advisory committee meeting date has since been changed to October 24, 2006 at the California Association of Counties building, 1020 11th Street, 2nd Floor, Sacramento.)**

Handouts

Copies of the following presentations and related materials:

- Approach to Funding Plan
- Process for Developing Preferred Alternative
- Review Process for Draft PEIR
- Schematics of the Final Range of Alternatives

ATTENDANCE

Advisory Committee Members or Alternates Present:

Marie Barrett, New River Citizens Congressional Task Force
Fred Cagle, Sierra Club
Bart Christensen, State Water Resources Control Board
Michael Cohen, Pacific Institute
Kim Delfino, Defenders of Wildlife
Bill DuBois, California Farm Bureau Federation
Bill Gaines, California Waterfowl Association
Larry Grogan, Imperial County
Bob Ham, Imperial Valley Association of Governments
Rick Hoffman, Riverside County
Al Kalin, Imperial County Farm Bureau
Julia Levin, Audubon California
Al Loya, Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Lisa Northrop, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Silvia Oey, Air Resources Board
Dan Parks, Coachella Valley Water District
Larry Purcell, San Diego County Water Authority
Vincent Signorotti, Geothermal Energy Association
Pete Silva, The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California
Mike Walker, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Dan Walsworth, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Bruce Wilcox, Imperial Irrigation District
John Wohlmuth, Coachella Valley Association of Governments
Nancy Wright, Regional Water Quality Control Board